

Christmas Eve, 2009
Good Hope Lutheran Church
Matthew 2:2
7 p.m.

Briefly now a word from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 2. The Wise Men said, Where is He? Where is this Baby born to be King?

Grace mercy and peace be multiplied among you all in the knowledge of God, and of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, AMEN.

You ever noticed, that when you lose something, it always turns out to be something extremely important somehow? I mean, the stuff that doesn't matter to me, stuff that's really pretty insignificant—well, I couldn't lose that stuff if I tried. But things that are actually important, they seem to get lost all the time!

For instance, over in the house, I have books. Books. And some of those books I have not seriously looked at in 20 years. I packed them up and moved them to Oklahoma, then packed them up and moved them again to Indiana, then packed them up and moved them again to Ohio—but I haven't actually *opened them up and read them* since seminary. But I know where they are. I have a system, the shelves are organized, so if you want to see my copy of The Epic of Gilgamesh, man I'm on it. I can find it for you. But my car keys? My cell phone?—my phone is blue, Mary's is red, every morning at the house it's like an Easter egg hunt, looking for our phones. First one to

find a phone has to call the other, so we can follow the sound of the ring and get that one too, somehow it's always stuff that matters that gets lost. Never the stuff, that doesn't.

Or, so it seems. And sometimes it seems that way in the church too. Oh, I can find my notes for the next council meeting, no problem. And I know where the Ping Pong table is, and the extra Ping Pong balls too, so we're ready to go at 5th Quarter! And I can certainly find a whole stack of letters, arguments and position papers, dealing with the last four months of fun at the synod level. Big. Deal. Big deal, the most I can say about Ping Pong and position papers is, it all certainly appears urgent at the time. But in the end, is it really all that important?

Not near as important anyway, as what gets lost. You know, the Baby in the manger? Shepherds, angels, wise men from the east. A promise made, and a promise kept, in all the busyness of congregational life. In all the commotion; the meetings the newsletters the sign up sheets, all the urgent details of life in the church sometimes I wonder, where's the Baby? Where is the Baby, born to be King—where's Jesus in all this? Have we come this far only to manage to lose the Christ Child? This amazing gift, the power and love of God come down to earth, how His own beloved Son entered this world as a helpless child, destined to die on a cross for us and for our

salvation—that's important! That matters! Where is it, where's the King, some days I don't know all I have, is a Ping Pong ball.

And if that happens here in the church, then heaven help the world. If that happens in the church then heaven help the world out there, a whole generation who can find their Master Cards but can't find the Master. You like that one by the way? I made it up myself—a whole generation who can find their Master Cards but not the Master. People who know the mall but not the manger; people who can find the TV Guide but not the Gospel; people who want to see the 10 Commandments posted in the principal's office but can't find them in their own Bibles and couldn't recite more than three of them if their lives depended on it; and so on, you get the point, we've lost something here. We've lost the Baby! The one born to be King! And it happens with each and every one of us in our daily lives, doesn't it? Doesn't it? I mean, follow a Christian around someday, follow each other, does this "believer" look and act any different from anybody else? Do you? And like I say, if that happens with us, people who bear the name of Jesus Christ, if we lose the Baby in our daily lives—what chance does the world have? What do we expect of the world out there, if we in here also, struggle to find Christ, even at Christmas.

But you see, somehow, that's the point. That's the point, this *problem*

we're talking about here, this sin—it's not the ruination of Christmas, it's the *reason* for Christmas! That's what it's all about! See, it's because we *can't find Christ*, that Christ came to find us! It's because we are lost and don't know where to go, that Jesus came to show us the way; it's because we are such stubborn, willful sinners that He came to die and rise again to save us. It's because we cannot and will not find God on our own, cannot will not even look—it's for that very reason God came to earth to find us. That's what Christmas is—God coming to earth as a helpless Baby to look for and find, *you!* And *when* God finds you—how's this for Good News?—when God finds you, His love *will not let you go*. Instead His love will be with you each day, forgiving, guiding, helping, sustaining—fitting you at last, for a place in the kingdom of heaven.

Yes, I am frustrated, at how secular this holiday has become in the world out there. And yes, I am peeved at myself, for letting my own cares and concerns and sense of self-importance try to crowd out the Christ as well. But I am saved, I am saved because this Baby *just won't give up*. We've been rescued, not because we found Him, but because He found us! And that's what Christmas is—God, come down, a baby in Bethlehem, looking, seeking, finding, saving. You

Once again this evening we've heard the story, the Bible verses telling us

what happened that night in Bethlehem so long ago. Joseph and Mary, cold and weary, looking for a place to stay. Shepherds then, a bit later, looking for Joseph and Mary! Wise men still later, looking for the Holy Family. Everybody's looking for something, you know, but the Baby is there, and He's looking for you—now it won't be long we'll be done here tonight. And we'll all head for home and put the Bethlehem story away for another year, but that Baby, He'll still be looking, and He won't quit. In your daily grind, when you're at the mall. At home, at school, at work, at church too of all places, He'll still be looking for you. We may put the story of shepherds / angels / little town of Bethlehem, we may put that up on the shelf and think we're done with Christmas, oh no. No we're not. He's still looking, and when He finds you. When He finds you, whenever wherever that may be. Merry Christmas.

May you pause long enough this evening, to be found by the Baby; and may you and yours have a blessed and merry Christmas, in the name of Jesus Christ, AMEN.

Christmas Eve, 2009
Good Hope Lutheran Church
John 1.1 ff
11 p.m.

Grace mercy and peace be multiplied among you in the knowledge of God,
and of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, AMEN.

So. Where's the Baby? Nice Gospel lesson but—where's the Baby? You
know, Jesus—the one born to be our King?

Earlier this evening I spoke about how easy it is for us to lose sight of
Christ—even at Christmas! We are so busy. We get so distracted, we know
what the season is *supposed* to be about, but life is so hectic and let's face it
we are so sinful—that it's easy for us to lose Christ, even at Christmas. In
our daily lives, we just can't find the Baby, and if that's true for us. People
who are after all theoretically Christian. If it's true for us then heaven help
the world out there, people who know Master Cards but not the Master,
people who have been to the mall but never to the manger, and so on, we
here can't find Christ at Christmas sometimes. They don't even know
they're supposed to be looking!

And then we come to this Gospel lesson, John chapter 1. Poetic verses, to
be sure, but I noticed we're missing something here. Midnight worship,
Christmas Eve, no Baby in the manger. No Baby, no shepherds, no angels
and wise men, *we* can't find Christ even at Christmas. Evidently, neither can

the Gospel itself!

Take another look. Take another look at this lesson, see, what I said at the earlier service—this problem of ours, this sin—we can't find Christ even at Christmas, we've lost all sight of God and so has America!—this problem. This *sin*. It's not the ruination of Christmas. No. It's the *reason for* Christmas. True, we *can't* find God, no matter how hard we look—so God found us. God found us, that's what Christmas is. That's Christmas, God looking *for you*, God not giving up till He finds you, that's what this day is all about! Not you finding the Baby but the Baby, the Baby Jesus, come to earth, to find you.

And that brings us back to this Gospel lesson, the one from John chapter 1. You're right, it doesn't mention shepherds and angels and wise men from the east, and it doesn't say anything about Mary and Joseph and the manger scene in Bethlehem. But what it *does* say, very clearly I believe, is that this God of ours has been looking for you, from the very beginning. *In the beginning*, John says, God had a plan, and the plan was Jesus, referred to here as *The Word*. Already in the beginning, when God was busy working on atoms and aardvarks and the Andromeda star system God already had it planned; how He would send Jesus to earth, just to find you, see. Your salvation is bigger than one night in Bethlehem. Your salvation is bigger

than one night in Bethlehem, in reality it's as old as creation. Older. It's as deep as the grave yet as high as the heavens; it's as fragile as the cry of that Child in the night yet as mighty as the rush of the wind that started the world spinning back in Genesis, your salvation is wrapped up in the very heart of God. The God who loved you and who swore an oath to save you, *in the beginning*.

Now, make no mistake, I *am* frustrated with a culture that has no room for Christ at Christmas. And I am disgusted sometimes with myself, because I can't seem to find the Baby Jesus either! But I am saved. I am saved by a God, who knew all along that He would enter the world this world He was making, just to rescue me! And you too, all of us, we are saved by an eternally merciful God who loved us even before even before the beginning. A God who will continue to love us, by the way, long after the end. A God who will stop at nothing, not even death and the grave and hell itself, a God who will stop at nothing. In order *to find you*.

On Christmas Eve, may you be so moved by the carols and the candles and the beauty of the moment, that you stop long enough to, look for Jesus, good idea? Good idea, look for Jesus, there in the manger. And when you stop to look, may it be, that you are found. And may you and yours have a blessed and Merry Christmas, in the name of Jesus Christ, AMEN.